



For Immediate Use

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Fall Is for Planting Trees, Shrubs, Lawns, Bulbs

Homeowners are discovering a new gardening season: autumn. "Professional gardeners and landscapers have always valued fall for planting trees and shrubs, seeding lawns and setting out spring-flowering bulbs such as tulips and daffodils," says Lin Diacont, President of the Virginia Green Industry Council. People are never more aware of trees than in autumn, when leaves turn brilliant shades of red, gold and orange and it is the perfect time for selecting colorful trees for color in your landscape next year.

The resurgence of home gardening has made the average gardener more ambitious than ever. People who once grew only petunias and geraniums now have vegetable gardens, fruit trees, shrub borders and even greenhouses. In spring, the traditional planting season, gardeners may be too busy to accomplish all their gardening goals. And during the dog days of summer, everyone wants to relax in the garden, not work in it.

Autumn, on the other hand, is perfect for gardening. The typically cool temperatures reduce stress on gardens and gardeners alike. Soil conditions could not be better. The earth becomes easy to work - neither dry and dusty as in summer, nor muddy as in spring. Young roots of newly-planted trees, shrubs, and sprouted grass start establishing themselves before frost hardens the ground, giving these plants a head start over those planted in spring.

Autumn is the one and only time to plant spring-flowering bulbs. They require a few months of in-ground refrigeration to perform their spring magic. In early fall, garden centers start offering bulbs that flower in all colors, sizes and shapes. Some bulbs bravely sprout in late winter. Late bloomers delay their appearances almost until summer. Countless other bulbs burst into bloom during the weeks in between.

Colorful crocuses are famous for breaking through frozen earth or melting snow. Snowdrops, winter aconite and glory-of-the-snow may unfurl even earlier. Soon thereafter, daffodils pop up everywhere, and hyacinths spread their sweet perfume.

By mid-spring tulips are in their glory. Particularly beautiful are sturdy, full-blossomed Triumph tulips and tall, regal Darwin hybrids. The "Queens of Spring" continue to reign in the form of late-season lily-flowered tulips, with their elegantly tapered, curved petals, and flamboyantly-feathered parrot tulips. Finishing touches to the blooming season are provided by Dutch irises and magnificent globe-shaped flowers of ornamental onions, called alliums.

Most bulb plants prefer sunshine, but because they flower before shade trees are fully in leaf, bulbs will brighten almost any garden spot. Plant them in flower beds, shrub borders and along walkways. Or create naturalistic clusters of bulbs in lawns and around tree bases. For "naturalizing," daffodils and crocuses work extremely well.

While browsing for bulbs at the garden center, you will probably notice a full selection of trees and shrubs ready for planting. By no means are they spring and summer leftovers. Nurserymen prepare containerized and balled-and-burlaped trees and shrubs for autumn because, as professionals, they know the time is right to transplant woody plants into the landscape. Heat and drought make life difficult for new trees and shrubs. If set in the ground in fall, the plants have two periods of cool weather growth - autumn and spring - to prepare for their first summer.

From a little acorn grew the great oak. Take to heart this adage when choosing sites for little oaks, maples, willows and other eventually large trees. Once a spot is selected another adage applies. Nurserymen say "Don't dig a \$5 hole for a \$10 tree." Dig a \$20 hole - twice the diameter of the root ball.

Weekly waterings during the first growing season, especially when dry weather persists, will help establish a healthy and vigorous root system, the key to a young tree's survival.

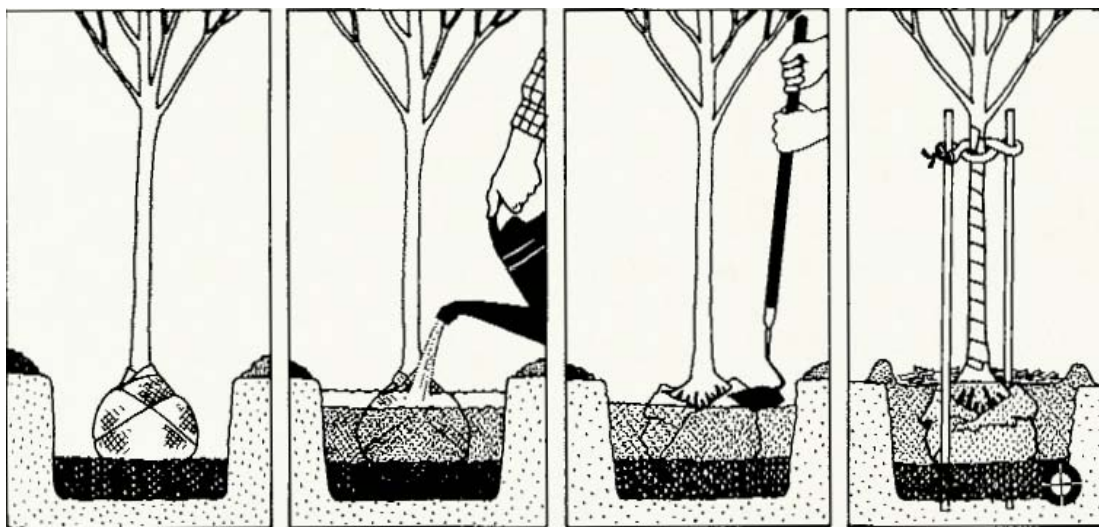
If attempts at summer lawn reseeding have failed, chances are you could not keep the seed beds sufficiently moist under the scorching sun. Grass seeds and sprouts prefer the warmish days and cool nights typical of autumn.

It is essential to choose appropriate grass seed for your particular property and climate. Consult with your local garden center's Virginia Certified Horticulturist to determine the grass strain or mixture that is best for you.

It is also the best time to apply fertilizer to your lawn, so roots can get established deeply which will enable them to better withstand the summer stresses next year.

Autumn is a season of marvelous transition. Leaves are changing color, summer flowers have transformed into bright berries, and the last vegetables are ready for harvest.

The Virginia Green Industry Council and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service encourage you to your part for the environment and plant an air-cleansing tree today. Your tree can serve as a living reminder of the responsibility we share for taking care of the world around us.



There are four basic steps to tree planting: 1) set the tree in the planting hole so the trunk base is neither buried nor elevated; 2) fill in with soil and water thoroughly; 3) firm the soil and add some extra if needed, creating a watering basin around the tree's base; and 4) finish the job by watering again, applying a mulch, and then staking and wrapping the trunk.

Jeff Miller, Virginia Certified Horticulturist and Executive Director of the Virginia Green Industry Council.

The Virginia Green Industry Council is the voice of the horticulture industry in the Commonwealth and is dedicated to enhancing the beauty of the state's environment, the well-being of our citizens, improving our state's economy, and improving the health and wellness for everyone in Virginia. The Council is made up of providers and consumers of horticultural products and services. The Council works to provide public and industry education, environmental guidelines and other information that will keep Virginia green and growing. For more information, visit www.viriniagreen.org; 540-382-0943; FAX: 540-382-2716; E-mail: info@viriniagreen.org